A Survey on Cultural Infiltration in High School English Teaching Under the Background of New English Curriculum Standards

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Abstract

Under the backdrop of the newly published New English Curriculum Standards of 2022 (NECS 2022), English teachers must clarify that English teaching encompasses not only language knowledge but also the integration of cultural knowledge. Through interviews with four English teachers from different high schools, this study reveals that while high school English teachers show an increased awareness of cultural integration, the actual imparting of cultural knowledge in teaching remains superficial. The dissemination of cultural knowledge by teachers is fragmented and lacks systematic organization. Nearly all high school English teachers have a basic understanding of "cultural knowledge." Teachers' understanding of "cultural knowledge" has evidently become more precise and in-depth compared to earlier studies, although it is still inadequate. Secondly, the teachers outlined the advantages of learning about different cultures for students' exams and skill development, demonstrating that they recognize the value of cultural understanding in teaching English. In addition, teachers also need to enhance their cultural literacy and meet specific requirements related to it. Therefore, from the perspective of teachers, the frequency and impact of cultural integration by teachers in high school English teaching have been enhanced. However, further research is needed to understand the specific reception effect on students.

Keywords

NECS 2022, High school English teaching, Cultural infiltration

1. Introduction

The NECS 2017 and NECS 2022 both clearly point out the curriculum objectives at the level of cultural awareness, requiring students to have a certain ability for cross-cultural communication and dissemination of Chinese culture. Intercultural communication and foreign language teaching are inseparable. From the above requirements, the state pays more and more attention to the cultivation of students' cultural awareness, advocates the infiltration of Chinese and foreign cultures in English teaching, and helps students form a cross-cultural perspective. As far as the current English college entrance examination is concerned, in recent years, whether in writing or reading or cloze and other topics, students are required to understand foreign culture, analyze the cultural differences between China and foreign countries, but also required to look at the problem dialectically (Fu Xiaodong & Qian Xusheng, 2018). Therefore, implementing cultural education in English classroom teaching and focusing on the cultivation of students' cross-cultural communication
awareness and abilities play a crucial role in students' English knowledge learning (Jiang Peipei, 2019).

The investigation and research on cultural infiltration in High school English teaching can help us understand the status of cultivating students' cultural awareness in the teaching process under the current circumstances, find out the shortcomings and difficulties of teachers in the process of cultural infiltration, and put forward effective solutions and strategies. It can also be compared with the existing research analysis to find out the problems that have been solved and the problems to be solved, and to explore whether the strategies provided by previous studies have a certain correlation with the problems that have been solved, and find out the guidance and strategies that are conducive to solving the problems that still exist.

2. Literature review

Initially, it is necessary here to clarify exactly what is meant by cultural infiltration. The paper published by Liu Shudan, Wang Min, and Xu Ting (2011) shows that cultural infiltration refers to the mutual blending of cultures in various fields among different nationalities. Cultural infiltration in language teaching practice is to integrate the cultural knowledge of different nationalities into language teaching and research, organically combine language practice and cultural knowledge, and cultivate cross-cultural communicative competence. The definition of cultural infiltration in English Teaching in the paper published by Huang Zhihua (2011) shows that in the teaching process, teachers should not only teach language knowledge itself, but also effectively integrate culture, constantly cultivate students' English cultural awareness, cultivate students' sustainable development ability of English learning, and independently construct the knowledgeability of English system.

In recent years, the promotion of Chinese traditional culture has become more and more important in the process of social development. More and more activities with the theme of "telling Chinese stories in English" have been held. Moreover, the college entrance examination has also strengthened the examination of students' cross-cultural communication ability. Therefore, the research in recent years has focused on the problem of too little infiltration of traditional culture in the process of English teaching, such as the research of Wang Juan (2019) and Jiang Peipei (2019). They usually dig out the causes of this problem and put forward suggestions and strategies. In addition, some studies are devoted to the analysis of the infiltration of foreign cultures in the process of English teaching. For example, the research of Hu Baoju (2022) on the path of integrating excellent traditional culture into higher vocational English teaching. These studies have chosen the infiltration of Chinese traditional culture or the infiltration of foreign culture for analysis, but they have an obvious disadvantage in that they can not find the common problems of infiltrating Chinese and foreign culture in the teaching process. Most of the studies on cultural infiltration in English teaching process are analyzed from the perspective of students, that is, from the results and effects of cultural infiltration, but there is almost no analysis of cultural infiltration in the English teaching process from the perspective of teachers. Therefore, the author decided to find another way to carry out research from the perspective of teachers. This research will attempt to fill this gap in existing knowledge by addressing the following research questions:

- **RQ1**: How much importance do teachers attach to cultural infiltration?
- **RQ2**: How do teachers carry out cultural infiltration in the teaching process?
- **RQ3**: What cultural infiltration difficulties have teachers encountered in the teaching process?

3. Methodology

1) **Research Questions**

- **RQ1**: How much importance do teachers attach to cultural infiltration?
- **RQ2**: How do teachers carry out cultural infiltration in the teaching process?
- **RQ3**: What cultural infiltration difficulties have teachers encountered in the teaching process?

2) **Research Subjects**

The research subjects are four high school English teachers, who have a wealth of teaching experience and can provide the research with front-line information.

3) **Research Instruments**

This study was conducted through a semi-structured interview with four high school English teachers. Semi-structured interviews can flexibly make necessary adjustments according to the actual situation of the interview, so as to collect more objective and real materials.

In order to get specific answers from teachers, the questionnaire must be tightly focused on the survey topic and the number of it should be limited. Therefore, the author designed five questions as the interview outline.

(1) What’s your understanding of cultural knowledge in the New English Curriculum standard?
(2) Do you think it is helpful for students to learn English by learning different cultures?
(3) Where do you usually get intercultural knowledge or improve your literacy?
(4) What are your ways to penetrate cultural knowledge into English Teaching?
(5) What difficulties have you met in Penetrating Cultural Knowledge in English?

Because the first main research question is too abstract, the first three interview questions we set are all aimed at solving the first main research question. Then the fourth interview question corresponds to the second research question and the fifth interview question corresponds to the third research question.

4. Results and discussion

This study aims to investigate the current situation of cultural infiltration of English teaching in senior high schools. In this chapter, the author will make an analysis of interviews of four senior high school teachers, who have taught at average for 9 years. The questions and answers will be discussed in this chapter.

1) Understanding of cultural knowledge in the New English Curriculum standard:

Most of the teachers suggest that cultural knowledge includes Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge, which is the foundation for students to understand cultural connotations, compare cultural similarities and differences, absorb cultural essence, and build up cultural confidence in their language learning activities. This understanding accords with the definition of cultural knowledge in the New National English Curriculum Standard. Teachers with correct understanding will be able to provide more culturally related information for students to further interpret texts in the teaching material, compare cultural phenomena as well as develop English subject core literacy. However, some teachers’ understanding of cultural knowledge is not profound enough. They just give a simple explanation that cultural knowledge is related to festivals, customs, or something that is beyond knowledge.

2) The benefits of learning Chinese and foreign cultural knowledge to learning English.

All the teachers think cultural infiltration in English teaching is of great significance. They suggest that learning Chinese and foreign cultures can arouse students’ interest in English study, which can help them develop English language skills and enrich English language knowledge. Besides, through learning and comparing, students can broaden their horizons and improve their critical thinking ability. From the perspective of examination-oriented education, with enriched cultural background knowledge, students can be more prepared to solve problems in exams, especially in reading and writing. For example, in the 2021 English college entrance examination, the writing sequel part mentions “breakfast in bed”, which is commonly seen in Western culture. However, some students didn’t know what “breakfast in bed” meant, for they hadn’t seen it before. Consequently, they misunderstood the passage, which had a negative influence on their writing. Teachers also mention that the new reform of college entrance examinations now pays more attention to culture.

3) Ways to improve teachers’ literacy

Generally, teachers will improve their literacy through reading professional books or novels. Also, they would like to watch some English dramas and movies to enrich their cultural background. It can be seen that most teachers focus on English materials to improve their English cultural knowledge but neglect their study of other cultures. Although the majority of content in senior textbooks is related to Western culture, there are indeed some cultures from Asia, Africa, and so forth.

The above three questions explored teachers’ attention to the infiltration of Chinese and foreign cultures from three levels: Teachers' cognition of the concept of "cultural knowledge", teachers' attitude towards cultural infiltration, and teachers' requirements for their own learning of cultural knowledge. Through the analysis of these three problems, the author found that almost all teachers have a general understanding of "cultural knowledge". Although their understanding is still not deep enough, compared with previous research, teachers' understanding of "cultural knowledge" is obviously more specific and detailed. Secondly, the teacher listed the benefits of learning cultural knowledge to students' examination and ability improvement, which shows that the teacher agrees that cultural knowledge is very important to English teaching. Moreover, teachers also have certain requirements for their own cultural literacy. They will also enrich their cultural knowledge by reading and watching movies. Therefore, the author concludes that teachers still pay more attention to the infiltration of Chinese and foreign cultures, but some teachers still lack the awareness of studying theoretical knowledge.

4) Ways to penetrate cultural knowledge into English Teaching

According to teachers’ answers, before class, they will pay attention to searching for some materials that may be used as supplements in class, such as some allusions, pictures, or videos. In the class, based on teaching content, they usually penetrate cultural knowledge into English teaching through some activities. After class, some teachers will give assignments that are related to specific cultural content. For example, they will ask students to search for some information...
about festivals before or after class. Usually, they will give some time for students to present in class, which can improve students’ language ability and enhance their cooperative and cultural awareness. Nevertheless, some teachers only focus on teaching in class. They seldom give an assignment that enables students to gain further information concerning culture.

5) Difficulties in Penetrating Cultural Knowledge to English Teaching

Objectively, the lack of cultural content in the teaching materials restricts teachers to teaching comprehensively and systematically. Most teachers claim that they can only explain something they’ve met in the book or test, which is scattered. What can be conveyed in class largely relies on the teachers themselves. Besides, due to time limitations, it is difficult for teachers to present all the necessary contents and extra materials in class. Moreover, ideology requires students to firm position in Chinese culture, but for teachers, how to guide students to respect the cultures of various countries, how to inherit our culture, and how to avoid worshiping foreign countries after learning Western culture are difficult to practice. Subjectively, since the lack of cultural content in the textbooks, teachers’ literacy is very important. The level of teachers’ cultural literacy causes the difference in teaching quality. Additionally, some students are poor in English. Thus, they may find it hard to understand some cultural phenomena and lack the motivation to learn.

5. Conclusion

Starting from the core literacy of English subjects, the research aims to investigate the current situation of cultural infiltration of English teaching in senior high schools. The author interviewed four English teachers for five specific questions. Based on the results, the author has a further understanding of what teachers think of cultural knowledge and how they penetrate cultural knowledge into their teaching process. It can be seen that most teachers have a deep understanding of cultural knowledge in the 2020 National English Curriculum Standard, which reflects their awareness of increasing the output of cultural knowledge in teaching. However, due to some factors, they still meet many difficulties in teaching practice.

This research still has many limitations. Firstly, this research made a survey based on four teachers’ answers, which cannot completely represent all of the teachers’ opinions towards this subject. Secondly, the five questions above are not comprehensive enough to gain information concerning the topic. This research needs more statistics. Thirdly, the research lacked an investigation of students’ learning effects. This research can be improved if some students’ feedback can be included.

To make this research more scientific and effective, the author needs to:

Firstly, choose the subject as many as possible, which can make the results more comprehensive.

Secondly, teaching is an interactive process. Thus, students’ opinions are of great importance. The author can do more questionnaires and interviews for both teachers and students.

Thirdly, the research time is short, which causes many limitations to this research. If the author can have more time to observe the teaching process and learn about students’ learning outcomes, this research will be more persuasive and comprehensive.

References


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